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THE STORY

OF

The Franklin Search

ILLUSTRATIVE OF

THE FRANKLIN RELICS,

BROUGHT TOGETHER AND EXHIBITED

IN THE

ROYAL NAVAL EXHIBITION,

1891.

PRINTED BY SAMUEL SIDDERS, 17, BALL STREET,

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The Story of the Franklin Search.

It is a brave story—a story of courage, discipline, and devotion to duty—a story of woman's faithful love inspiring strong men to perform acts of daring, which will live for ever.

It is well that this story should now be repeated to the younger generation arising among us, that they may realise more and more that they spring of a heroic race, and that they in their turn are expected to do their duty; with the strengthening conviction, inspired by such facts as we have here to tell, that whenever an Englishman falls in the discharge of that duty, his countrymen will never rest, until they have verified his fate, and brought to light his achievements.

The subject of Arctic discovery early engaged the attention of Englishmen. King Alfred the Great wrote about it 1,000 years ago. Many great seamen have been trained in that stern school; among others, Sir Humphrey Gilbert, Frobisher, and Davis, Baffin, Sir Hugh Willoughby, and Nelson himself.

The dream of our fathers was to discover the North-West Passage. This means to find a navigable water-way round the north of America, into the Pacific Ocean, by which our sea-borne commerce might reach China and

India westward, without the long voyage round Cape Horn, or the Cape of Good Hope.

A North-West Passage has been proved to exist, both by Sir John Franklin's Expedition, and by Sir Robert McClure's ; but it is so blocked by ice that no ship has ever passed through. Still though this has not been found a practicable way, our fathers were right in apprehending the great importance of a northern road for our commerce westward ; and we, their children, have now accomplished our true North West Passage, by the recently constructed Canadian Pacific Railway, which meets our ships on the Atlantic side, and carries their cargoes across to our other ships on the Pacific cost, whence they can pass right round again to England, either by sea, or through the Suez Canal, thus making the circuit of the world under our national flag. When this great Canadian highway was opened in 1886, England clasped her girdle around the world — but our fathers thought to achieve this grand result entirely by sea ; and with this high ideal, many a brave heart, and many a good ship went out in search of the North West Passage to China and India.

The last of these expeditions was sent out by Government in 1845, for the discovery of the North-West Passage, and the investigation of science in the far North. This expedition consisted of two of the strongest of Her Majesty's ships, the "Erebus" and "Terror," manned by some of the best officers and men in our navy, and commanded by Sir John Franklin, a leader of great experience and capacity.

They sailed in June, 1845, provisioned for upwards of three years ; and were heard of "All Well" as far as Melville Bay, latitude 76°, 26th of July, 1845.

From that day silence settled down. Months went by, and slowly grew into years; and in 1847 serious anxiety became aroused. Who can understand the long strain, the sickening hope deferred of those at home, whose dear ones had departed into silence. One hundred and twenty-nine brave men were missing; and each was the loved one of some faithful heart.

Among those faithful hearts, the name of Lady Franklin will go down to posterity, as one of the noblest specimens of the true English wife. Year after year, she spent, and was spent, in her husband's cause, until her fortune, once large, had almost disappeared; until her relations were estranged by what they thought wasteful expenditure; until she had passed from middle life to an old a[illegible] indeed by past anxieties, but crowned with the r[illegible]dmiration of all good men and women, and rewa[illegible] final success which attended the long and arduous [illegible] She had no hope of ever seeing her husband alive. He had left England in broken health, and she knew that he could not long endure the hardships of prolonged Arctic work. But she felt it to be her duty to rescue any possible survivors of his expedition; to establish his fame, and make known the closing labours of a life spent in his country's service.

This became henceforward her constant work. She offered £2,000 reward for information. She besieged the Admiralty with requests for further search. She fitted out ships at her own expense. She gathered around herself a band of men, who served her with most loyal devotion, and laboured in the cause, both at home, and in the perilous fields of Arctic search.

The fire of enthusiasm spread: volunteers were found to

man every ship commissioned. Our kinsmen in America caught the flame, and princely merchants came forward to fit out ships, and help in the search.

Wearily, year after year, mile after mile of coast-land in the far North was searched for any trace or record of the lost Expedition. Brave men toiled, and suffered, and died in the cause of their missing brethren, and slowly grew up a record of gallant deeds, which have made names among us illustrious for all time.

Three strong Government Search Expeditions went out; the first in 1848, returning in 1849, but without any result. The next Expedition started in 1850 and came home in 1851. It ascertained that Franklin had spent his first winter at Beechey Island, where the graves of three of his crew were found, with head-boards and inscriptions; some simple relics also were collected in the immediate neighbourhood, but nothing further was brought to light.

In 1852, an Expedition, consisting of five vessels, was fitted out by the Admiralty; but although a vast deal of coast line was discovered and searched, no further traces of Franklin were found. This Expedition did not return till 1854. These Expeditions between them, carefully searched more than 20,000 miles of coast line, for traces of the lost Expedition. This part of the search was accomplished by means of sledges, which were drawn by men over the rough sea ice. This travelling can only be accomplished during some three months of the year, from the return of daylight to the Artic regions, until the thaw sets in, in July. No more arduous work can be undertaken by man. Some small idea of it may be formed from what is shewn in this Exhibition; but a mere representation of

sledge travelling, shewn during an English summer, and under the roofed gallery of an Exhibition, can give but a poor notion of what these brave men cheerfully faced for their brethren's sake. On their sledges were packed the food required by the travellers, their tents, and sleeping gear, in fact all that they needed; the country affording them nothing, except snow to be melted for water. They had no power of making any fire, their cooking was done over a lamp. During these journeys, the temperature ranged from 45 degrees *below* zero, to 50 degrees *above*, being a range of 95 degrees.

As experience increased, they learned how to provide for longer journeys, from 30 days in the first Expedition, to 105 days in the later ones. In this manner, as stated above, upwards of 20,000 miles of mostly unknown coast-line were searched and accurately mapped. It will be easily understood, that to accomplish this, it was necessary to travel over much more than double that number of miles, including the going and returning, the replenishing of provision depots, &c.

A very experienced naval officer, the late Admiral Sir Henry Kellett, who for the first time took part in Arctic work, writing in 1853, said :—

"I have been a long time at sea, and seen various trying "services, but never have seen such labour, and such misery "after. Men require much more heart and stamina to "undertake an extended travelling party, than to go into "action. The travellers have their enemy chilling them to "the very heart, and paralyzing their limbs; the others the "very contrary."

These are strong words, yet even they take no account of

another aspect of the same work, namely the strain to brain and eye-power, involved in the constant look-out required, under an intense snow-glare; because these were *searching* parties, always scanning the horizon for the smallest indication of a cairn or post, set up by the missing expedition—or any other sign of their having passed that way.

Between 1852 and 1854 the Franklin Search reached its greatest extension, no less than 13 ships, English and American, being at the same time in Arctic waters. By the autumn of 1854 every man was withdrawn, and nothing remained, except five abandoned ships, which were inextricably fixed in the ice; and Franklin's still missing ships and crews, for whose rescue all this grand exertion had been put forth, and all to no purpose.

The friends of the Search were now almost in despair; when news reached England that Dr. Rae, a Hudson Bay officer, employed by that Company in the geographical exploration of their North American territory, between Repulse Bay and Castor and Pollux River, had learned from the natives there, that some years before, a party of white men had marched south from King William's Island, and perished about the mouth of Back's River. Dr. Rae procured from these same natives various spoons and forks, with crests showing them to have belonged to Franklin's officers, and several other articles. Still, not one scrap of writing had been recovered, nor did we know how far the "Erebus" and "Terror" had penetrated; nor what the final catastrophe had been, nor how much of their task our countrymen had accomplished before they fell at their post of duty. Nevertheless, the Admiralty decreed in 1856 that the search was to cease; and all money publicly voted as

rewards was handed over to Dr. Rae and his party; and the Franklin Search was officially closed.

But Lady Franklin refused to accept this official decision. To her "Nothing was done while aught remained to do," and one more final effort she was determined to make.

Mostly at her own expense, though with assistance from a few friends, she purchased the yacht "Fox," which has become so famous, and whose silver model is here exhibited. The "Fox" was carefully fitted out for the Arctic service by Captain (now Admiral Sir Leopold) McClintock, to whose command she was entrusted, and who had served with distinction in the three consecutive Government Expeditions, having been repeatedly mentioned in dispatches, and twice promoted. He was ably supported by his two officers, Lieut. Hobson, R.N., and Captain (now Sir Allen) Young.

The "Fox" sailed in 1857, alone, with no companion ship to fall back upon. She was a small screw yacht of 177 tons burthen, and her crew consisted of 25 souls, all told. Captain McClintock's purpose was to take her, as near as ice would permit, to the shores of King William's Island, and thence to follow by sledge the route indicated by Esquimaux report, namely from King William's Island to Back's River, on the North American Continent.

The first year, the "Fox" was beset by ice, and thus failed to get into any winter quarters; spending months in great peril, caught by ice, in the waters of Baffin's Bay, and slowly drifting all the winter towards the open sea. This was a marvellous drift of eight months' duration, and of over 1,100 miles, quite out into the Atlantic. Here, at the end of April, the ice was broken up by the swell of the

ocean, raised by a heavy gale; and, amid the wild tournament of ice and storm, the little "Fox" was set free. It is difficult to imagine anything finer than the escape of this little vessel; nor anything more resolute than the immediate use made of her freedom, in once more turning her head back to the north. But the nearest approach she was able to make to the goal of all her hopes was Bellot Straits, some 200 miles from it, where she spent her second winter in safe quarters; and, in early spring, 1859, her sledge parties went out to search the coast of King William's Island.

Being fully persuaded that Franklin's party would never have abandoned their ships, without leaving a record behind them, Captain McClintock sent Lieut. Hobson to search the West Coast of King William's Island, while he himself went southward towards Back's River, by the East Coast, returning northward by the West Coast to meet Hobson, after that officer had had a chance of examining the more likely place for any record to have been left, and thus winning his promotion to Commander's rank, a hope justified by the event, since it was in the region anticipated by McClintock, that Hobson in May, 1859, came successively upon two cairns, each containing a record, identical as far as they go, and both exhibited in this building. The more important one, in the central glass case, after having originally been deposited in a cairn in 1847 by Franklin's own party, had been opened one year later by themselves, to add the final information, that after having been for two winters beset in the ice off that immediate coast, they had been compelled to abandon their ships, and were retreating towards Back's

River, having already lost by death Sir John Franklin himself, eight officers and fifteen men.

Not another scrap of writing has ever been recovered; but strewn along the shores of King William's Island were found sad and convincing proofs, that the native account given to McClintock on the east coast was correct, that the white men, who were seen dragging heavy boats on sledges, in the hope of ascending Back's River in them, were very sick, and "fell down and died as they walked along;" no one survivor being left to tell the tale to any civilised man.

But McClintock also proved that before they died, they had attained the object of their search, having discovered a North-West passage. Their death-march across the frozen sea to the North American Continent accomplished this Passage, two years prior to McClure's independent discovery.

Thus literally, as has been finely said, "They forged the last link with their lives;" and, faithful to the end, died in achieving the very purpose for which their country had sent them out.

All doubt was now at an end. McClintock brought home the two records discovered, and a selection of the many sad relics found strewing the ground. These now form the most interesting, and the greatest portion of the Franklin Relics in this Exhibition. No more touching record can be seen than these last written words from the "Erebus" and "Terror"—simple words, penned by Crozier and FitzJames, brave men, who had done their duty, and had now but to die.

Thus ended the Franklin Search; having lasted longer than the Siege of Troy; and called forth as valiant deeds as ever inspired an epic poem. The story is a tragedy com-

plete enough in itself; but illuminated by such high qualities as may well make us proud of our race and our country; for, as General Charles Gordon told us, "England was *made* by her adventurers." And England will never decay as long as Courage, Discipline, and Endurance survive among us, such as kept Franklin's party a united band, even in their doomed and hopeless march; and such as carried to a triumphant close the determination of brother-seamen to ascertain their history, and bring to light their achievements; even if, in so doing, they themselves should have to share their fate.

Brave souls, your deeds of daring
On ocean leave no trace;
But hearts have shrined your memory
Within their holy place.

And unborn generations
Will hand the story down,
How Duty forged your Armour,
And Glory wove your Crown.

To be sold for the benefit of the Royal Scripture Readers' Society, 4, Trafalgar Square, W.C.; and for Royal Naval Charities.